



Facts At-A-Glance

- Hepatitis C is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis C virus (HCV).
- HCV is spread by direct contact with infected blood.
- Approximately 25% of people fully recover from HCV within six months after exposure and 75% of people develop long term or chronic HCV.
- At least 4 million Americans are infected with HCV. Of those, 3.2 million have chronic HCV.
- There is no vaccine to prevent HCV.
- Stop the spread of HCV by avoiding direct contact with other people's blood, not sharing combs, toothbrushes, or other personal items, and using clean needles.
- Most people with HCV have no symptoms.
- HCV is diagnosed by blood tests.
- Chronic HCV can lead to cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver, liver cancer, and liver failure.
- Chronic HCV is the leading cause for adult liver transplantation in the U.S.
- For some patients, medications can help fight HCV.



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Hepatitis C



Why is the liver important?

The liver is the second largest organ in your body and is located under your rib cage on the right side. It weighs about three pounds and is shaped like a football that is flat on one side.

The liver performs many jobs in your body. It processes what you eat and drink into energy and nutrients your body can use. The liver also removes harmful substances from your blood.

What is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis C virus (HCV). HCV causes the liver to swell and prevents it from working well.

Acute HCV occurs within six months after exposure and approximately 25% of people with acute HCV fully recover during this time. About 75% of people with acute HCV develop long-term or chronic HCV. Unless successfully treated with medications, chronic HCV can lead to cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver, liver cancer, and liver failure.

Who is at risk of having hepatitis C?

Anyone whose blood has come in direct contact with HCV-infected blood is at risk.

- Have ever injected or inhaled drugs (even once)
- Received a blood transfusion or organ transplant before July 1992
- Received a clotting factor made before 1987
- Have ever been on hemodialysis
- Have had abnormal ALT levels several times (on blood test results)
- Have ever worked or come in contact with infected needles or blood
- Have ever worked or been housed in a prison
- Were born to an HCV-infected mother
- Have HIV
- Have ever had unprotected sex (with multiple partners)
- Have ever had a sexually transmitted disease
- Have ever had tattoos or body piercings

What are symptoms of hepatitis C?

Most people with acute or chronic HCV have no symptoms. When symptoms occur, they may include tiredness, itchy skin, dark urine, muscle soreness, nausea, loss of appetite, stomach pain and jaundice (a yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes).

Someone can have HCV for years or even decades without symptoms.

How is hepatitis C diagnosed?

Hepatitis C is diagnosed by blood tests.

Blood tests are done to check if HCV antibodies are in the body. Antibodies are proteins created by the immune system in response to viruses.

For patients with HCV, a liver biopsy may be needed to check how much of the liver is damaged. During a biopsy, a small piece of liver tissue is removed and studied in the lab.

How is hepatitis C treated?

Acute HCV

Doctors often recommend bed rest, drinking lots of fluids, eating a healthy diet and avoiding alcohol. Medicines may be used to treat acute HCV. It is important to see your doctor regularly to have tests done to make sure your body has fully recovered from the virus.

Chronic HCV

Doctors may recommend taking pegylated interferon and ribavirin for chronic HCV. They may prescribe additional or newly approved medicines that can improve treatment results. These medicines do not work for all people with hepatitis C. Also, these medicines can have serious side effects. The length of treatment can vary based on the patient's HCV genotype. Genotypes refer to different strains of a virus.

If you have HCV, it is important to talk to your doctor about treatment options and liver cancer screenings every 6-12 months. Also, talk to your doctor about hepatitis A and hepatitis B vaccines.

What is the best way to manage hepatitis C?

Many hepatitis C patients can lead active lives.

- Eat healthy meals
- Exercise
- Rest when you feel tired
- Take only the medications recommended by your doctor
- Avoid alcohol and drugs
- See a liver doctor regularly (hepatologists and gastroenterologists)
- Keep all medical appointments
- Talk to your doctor about hepatitis A and hepatitis B vaccines

What is the best way to stop the spread of hepatitis C?

There is no vaccine to prevent HCV. The only way to stop the spread of HCV is to avoid direct contact with infected blood.

- Do not share needles
- Use recommended safety measures if you are exposed to blood or needle sticks at work
- Practice safe sex
- Use clean needles and equipment for tattoos or body piercings
- Do not share razors, toothbrushes, or other personal items with others
- Wear gloves if you have to touch someone's blood